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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the concept of the "whole" child changed from 1890 to 1940 and how those changes affected approaches to early childhood education during that time. The literature survey is based on the content of the published proceedings of the Kindergarten Department of the National Educational Association. Examination of the literature found the following six dimensions of the whole child identified: the spiritual, aesthetic, physical, mental, social, and emotional dimensions. In the decade before 1900, several views of the child coexisted. The Froebelian notion of the child as spiritual, spontaneous, and innately good was reexamined in the light of science, and the new child psychology introduced the concept of a child with animal instincts, impulses, and habits. The objective, scientific study of children suggested that the child was neither good nor bad, and that the child's development was dependent upon nature and the environment. The goal of kindergarten was to supplement the nurture of the home and establish good habits, shape good citizens, and provide moral instruction. In 1923, criticism of behaviorism appeared, leading to the view that the inner life of the child was to be liberated to allow the child to reach his or her potential. The child had needs that had to be met, and the goal of education was to contribute to the growth of the well-rounded child's personality. The scientific study of children continues today, and while such study may encourage distance from children and condescension, it can also produce new respect for them. (Contains 46 references.) (TM)

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The Concept of the Child: 1890-1940

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The Concept of the Child: 1890-1940

Meliorating views of the nature of the child have interested scholars and early educationists for many years; many books have been published on the topic (Aries, 1962; Cleverley & Phillips, 1986; deMause, 1974; Hoyles, 1979; Pollock, 1983; Sommerville, 1982). Throughout the history of Western civilization, children have been viewed as miniature adults, angels, empty vessels, unformed animals, exasperating parasites, and possessions for work or amusement (Elkind, 1994; Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1990; Polakow, 1992; Polakow, 1993; Weber, 1984). Early childhood programs reflect changing concepts of the child (Beatty, 1995; Weber, 1984; Wortham, 1992). A study of the history of early childhood education is rooted in the study of the changing concept of the child.

The purpose of this study was to examine the way in which the concept of the child changed from 1890-1940 and how those changes affected the approaches to early childhood education within this fifty-year period. A content analysis of the published proceedings of the Kindergarten Department of the National Educational Association formed the basis of this study.

Waves and Streams

An examination of the contents of the NEA Proceedings from 1890 to 1940 reveals that the construct of the "whole" child may be viewed in terms of waves and streams of emphases. Six dimensions of the "whole" child are referred to throughout the presentations in this fifty-year period: spiritual, aesthetic, physical, mental, social and emotional. Throughout the pages of the NEA Proceedings during this time period, one meets the spiritual child, the malleable child, the natural developing child, the child as object and subject of experiments, the social child, the active spontaneous free child, as well as the standard child and the deviant, delinquent, abnormal child.

Clearly, popular theories influenced the lens from which the child was viewed. The changing construct of the "whole" child can be viewed as a reaction to adult fears when faced with a changing society.

The Spiritual Child of Froebel

The Froebelian child was a spiritual, spontaneous, innately good child. "The love for the beautiful, the love for truth, for nature, for our fellow men and for God are innate characteristics of the child, and, if not interfered with, will remain forever, and can be effectually strengthened by intelligent and thoughtful direction" (Kraus-Boelte, 1899, p. 535). And as a result, the work of a good kindergarten was "preeminently religious and ethical. Work in the kindergarten from beginning to end has reference to the religious promise in the growth of the child" (Hailmann, 1887, p. 332).

From Romanticism to Scientific Investigation

The advent of the child study movement in the late 1890s heralded a new era in which science and reason would rule over intuition. In 1897 John Dewey in an address at the NEA in Milwaukee, Wisconsin said:

> While the child-study movement in name is a recent affair, and while in many of its superficial features it deserves the name sometime given it- that of a fad - in its underlying reality it represents the culmination of educational and social forces which have been at work for generations and presents itself as a factor which must be permanently reckoned with (Dewey, 1897, p. 585-6).

Although some were skeptical about science and the promise of child study, the scientific age was advancing a new view of childhood:

> There are many among us who say, "Out upon child study; it is worthless. The mind, the spirit, so transcends bodily conditions, and is so

superior to its environment, that all this gathering of data of the effects of physical conditions upon mental states is folly." (Payne, 1897, p. 587)

Kindergartners must say, if they be honest, "First let us see that we be true, and next Froebelian." To all these child study has offered much, not alone in actually new material and new light , but beyond that, the greatest help has come to the kindergartner when, struck by an apparent antagonism, she has been forced to read her Froebel anew, and to approach his teachings with a new view of childhood, and gain the strength which comes from the effort to reconcile the modern and scientific with the old and prophetic" (Payne, 1897, p. 592-93).

Froebelians continued to emphasize that science is but one side of the truth:

Froebel would tell us that we have no right to go by the light of science alone and deny the witness of poets, philosophers, and prophets from all time, to another side of the shield; that we have no right to study children's cruelty without their tenderness and heroism, their fears without their courage, their bodies without their souls. Study on these points has been so one-sided...Let us study the manifestations of spirit as well as body, as Froebel urges, "in ourselves and our children, in nature and history, that we may perceive general as well as special laws of development, and that child training may receive, in these laws, its surer basis and true foundation" (O'Grady, 1897, p. 597-8).

Professor Thomas P. Bailey, Jr. (1899) of the University of California presented an interesting paper in which he described three basic images of the child prevalent during this period among kindergarten theorists and practitioners: the angelic theory, the neuromuscular theory, and the recapitulation theory. The angelic theory held that the child is "regarded as a dreamer about infinity and eternity. It comes perfect from the hands of the Creator and is corrupted only in the hands of man. Wonderful spiritual insight has this child, that is thereby enabled to divine the inner significance of things mundane with the aid of the prophetic and priestly guidance of the kindergartner" (Bailey, 1899, p. 542). The child according to the neuromuscular theory is a "bundle of reflex arcs, waiting to be joined together into more complex reflex arcs. Properly graded stimuli will do the work" (Bailey, 1899, p. 542). In the recapitulation theory the child is "supposed to recapitulate the history of the racial development. The instincts of the race appear in a more or less generalized form in the development of the individual" (Bailey, 1899, p. 542).

Mary F. Ledyard, Supervisor of Kindergartens in Los Angeles, provides an example of the angelic view of the child and the recapitulation theory in combination as she speaks about the meaning of a child's play:

> It's simply an expression of the yearning of the soul of the child to reach out and grasp and assimilate something beyond and outside of himself - to take on the symbol, at least of power and freedom. The feeble-minded do not evince this desire, and so long as we check it in the normal child, or do not give it an opportunity for free expression, we are checking a God-given soul-elevating instinct which should be utilized...."In imitative play", E.H. Russell says, "the child epitomizes the fundamental experiences of the race"

> ...Play is thus seen to be at once reminiscent and anticipatory - a welding of the future to the past...If wisely guided, this instinct of imitation will draw to the surface at the most delicate tendrils of the child's spiritual nature and so strengthen by entwining themselves about the foundation of character and mind structure, that no power or upheaval in future years can tear them away" (Ledyard, 1899, p. 549).

The decade preceding the commencement of the 20th century could be characterized as one in which differing views of the child co-existed. The Froebelian child was beginning to be reexamined in light of the challenge of science and reason to intuition. The child as seen by the philosopher was giving way to views of the child through the scientist's lens. The new child psychology introduced a little child with impulses, instincts, and capacities.

Animals, Instincts, Impulses, and Habits:
The Standardization of Physical and Mental Aspects of Childhood

The pages of the NEA proceedings from 1900-1915 contained varying images of the child. Froebelian kindergartners continued to caution audiences:

> "We must not lose sight of the fact that the child is to be considered as a prime factor in his own education; and each truth or experience, as it comes to him, must bear within itself that which appeals to his dual nature - his mind and his heart, his understanding and his will. No method which divorces this unity will ever succeed. If we have committed this fatal error, atonement can be made only by a thoro study of the child's affections, of his will, of his desires as well as of his rationality" (Putnam, 1901, p. 507).

But Darwinian influences were strong; animals and children were viewed as similar beings. In 1901, Miss Charlotte M. Powe, Supervisor of Primary Grades in Columbia, South Carolina likened a child's work and play with a mockingbird's behavior and a dog's activities:

> I watched a young mockingbird on its first descent from the nest. It repeatedly stretched its wings and fanned the air, then hopped briskly for some yards. This it continued for some time, until, wearied with the exertion, it sought the low branches of a shrub, where it sat resting and being fed by the mother bird. A dog, after a long hunt, spends the rest of the day in sleeping off his fatigue. After reading steadily for some time, the boy throws down his book and has a romp with his brother or a run with his dog...Thru all nature runs the rhythmic arsis and thesis of rest and recuperation, work and play, each setting off the other, each necessary to the other...This rhythmic balance is natural to physical and mental life, and if the play in either is thwarted or unduly emphasized, the harmony will be destroyed and the result will be physical or mental weakness, perhaps deformity" (p. 507-8).

The child was reduced to "little more than an animal" and his actions were "merely instinctive" (Powe, 1901, p. 509).

The mind of the child was considered "analogous to that of the adult; the two are similar but not alike" (Schallenberger, 1907, p. 463). The child's mind was in a special state - "that of passive attention. If he be a normal human being of four or five years, he must attend to the sights, sound, and other stimuli offered by the outside world. He is more of an animal than he will be later" (Schallenberger, 1907, p. 465).

The young child as seen by the scientist was unformed. Earl Barnes (1908)

said:

> And because a little child is weak and unformed, and his ideas run always before his powers, he seeks to realize himself in imitative play...This, then, is the material we have to work upon - an undeveloped human being, active, chaotic, social and hence imitative, ineffective and so driven to imagine, invent, and play at all sorts of actuality. The curriculum must be made to fit this individual and it must also anticipate and lead toward the life that we wish the child to grow into (p. 504).

The child was viewed as an organism with instincts and ideal education was that which trained the child in useful habits.

> Now every human being is provided with a dominant reflex system almost as complete as that of the animals and almost able to do the work of life...Included in this reflex system are the fundamental instincts: anger, fear, curiosity, hate, love, and the fundamental appetites of food and sex. All these are born afresh with every child. They cannot be eliminated and it would not be wise to try to eliminate them, but they can be greatly modified and sublimated (Thomas, 1915, p. 668).

The special function of the kindergarten was to:

> "supplement the nurture of the home and establish right habits; not only habits of gait and general bearing, of voice and even of expression of countenance, and the mental habits of attention, observation, etc., but to give direction to the deep things of life; opening the eyes to the beauty of the world; stirring the soul by

> the mysteries of nature, and rousing awe which helps impress the imminence of God. If religion is to be a force in life, the child must never lose his sense of the conscious presence of God, and the assurance that the eternal life begins here and now (Barnard, 1907, p. 461).

The child as seen through the lens of the scientist was neither good nor bad, but rather a "bundle of impulses":

> The young child is a bundle of impulses. Some of these impulses lead to acts which we consider wrong, and some to acts which we consider right. If the good impulses are frequently repeated, the outcome will be a reaction that will be habitual. At different times the instincts of the child ripen and the child manifests certain tendencies; for example, at a certain time he has a tendency to walk, to talk, to sing, and many other activities. Before the impulse comes to do these things, not much can be done to develop or train the child in these matters, but when the tendency arrives, it should receive prompt attention.
>
> It is the business of early education to afford wholesome conditions for the development of good tendencies, and either to starve out bad impulses by lack of suggestion, or to suggest and develop a reaction that is not harmful" (Dyer, 1909, p. 439).

The true method of educating the young child was "to be found in the thoro study of the laws of the child's own physical and mental growth as revealed by the patient inductions of genetic science" (Dyer, 1909, p. 444).

The experiments and studies of children resulted in a standardization of childhood:

> Childhood is the same the world over. It, with the laws of development, remains the same. It is , however, greatly modified by variable factors, the many conditions of family and social life, climatic environment, and influences. While the reaction of these influences differs with individuals, two elements - "the child," and "the laws of development" - remain the same. These factors, variable and constant, the true kindergartner keeps ever in view.
>
> In the kindergarten the aim is not to give definite knowledge but to give freedom to child nature, to stimulate and fix wholesome interest, to arouse and quicken the senses, to direct his development in channels which, if followed, will lead him to well-balance, law-abiding citizenship, and make of him a good neighbor and a helpful member of a household" (Harris, 1910, p. 397).

Nature and the Environment

The "objective" study of children's mental and physical development revealed that the child's nature was neither good nor bad, but was dependent upon the environment in which the child grew as well as inherited capabilities.

> A science which seeks out all kinds of information regarding the body and mind of the child, and which aims to understand all departures from normal standards, physical, mental, and moral, cannot fail to be of inestimable value to the educator and to the child. Into the web and woof of the educational winding-sheet encircling the life of every child, into the web and woof of his every conscious act

> is woven the strong and controlling influence for good or evil of a healthful or an unhealthful home environment.
>
> The poor we have always with us, and every educator of today is facing the problem of the poorly-housed, ill-nourished child of the congested city tenement with hygienic conditions that have dwarfed his physique and robbed him of a fair physical chance, and with moral conditions ill-fitted to keep him in the paths o rectitude (Colton, 1910, p. 410).

The child was viewed as malleable and the teacher's job was to shape the child into a good citizen:

> As teachers we have looked deeply into the souls of children and seen the lights and shadows of impression, our work, reflected therein. While we are moving the waters, comes the change of habit from unorganized to organized condition. Whatever comes to us in embryo for good or bad, we can send forward in the solid realization of clean flesh and blood. We know that habit is that which has become cells and we aim to change these or to start new ones (Hofer, 1911, p. 483).

Moral instruction was imperative as the child could either be bad or good if left to chance:

> In short, for many present-day problems a child has no trustworthy instinctive basis, and the ability and disposition for right reaction must be developed thru instruction...It is not too much to say that many a child has the physiological basis of a good or bad disposition laid in the first two or three months of its life. Regular

> habits of eating, sleeping, bathing, can be established during the first days of life. Sticklers for nomenclature insist on calling this training, but from the standpoint of the mother and nurse who purposes and plans the ways and means of accomplishing this result, it is instruction" (Rugh, 1911, p. 500-501).

The kindergarten child was in "the plastic period, when habits are readily formed and conduct most easily influenced" (McConkey, 1911, p. 509). "The kindergarten stage is that of instincts, the formative period, the foundation of his later life of habits of thought, habits of speech, and habits of action" (Pluss, 1911, p. 505).

Luella Palmer, a kindergartner working in a public school in New York City, gave an address titled "The Principles of Development as the Basis for Kindergarten Method". She referred to five laws of human development:

> 1. Each human being must start at any moment from the point to which his peculiar heredity and experience have brought him. The ordinarily normal person has inherited a certain common physical form as well as certain interests and capacities. Yet each one has something unique in his heredity which marks him off from every other individual. These inherited characteristics are gradually combined with experiences, the sum-total of which differs for each individual. Each human being can develop only from the point which is the result of his particular inheritance modified by his particular experiences.
>
> 2. Since heredity cannot, of course, be changed after birth, experiences are the only developing agents, and are therefore the only material that man can assimilate....

3. Experiences that do not satisfy some immediate need of the individual are unused and therefore of no value in his life... The needs of an individual which must be satisfied vary greatly, but, unless the case is abnormal, they would differentiate into needs for more facts, more beauty, more social participation, more faith...

4. ...A slower rate with well-rounded development produces a creature variable enough to continue in the line of development... Man will continue developing only as a unified whole.

5. ...Man, like lower organisms, can develop; but, unlike them, he can consciously develop his developing power. He can project a goal and pull himself ahead by selecting means to arrive at it. He can select a moving goal that will grow with his growth (Palmer, 1910, p. 379).

The Social and Expressive Child

Speaking about the demonstration play school of the University of California in 1916, Mrs. C.W. Hetherington, Director of the school, referred to the child as:

...a bundle of hungers and instinct tendencies, and in these hungers and instincts are found the fundamental springs of all his conduct. He acts spontaneously because he is driven from within. He is spontaneously a manipulator of things and of ideas. He is spontaneously linguistic and talks until he can express what he thinks and feels. He is spontaneously social and enters into social relationships. He is spontaneously suggestible and educable; he is a follower, an imitator, craving

> leadership and instruction in ways of acting that will satisfy his hungers and give him adjustment (p. 298-9).

> It seems a far cry from the education of a child to the development of democracy; but the analysis of the mental processes of child and adult, and the increast [sic] understanding of the educational value of play in all its phases, are giving us a new conception of the significance of childish occupations, not only for individual development, but for social and national progress as well (Smith, 1916, p. 294).

The pages of the Kindergarten Department in the Proceedings of the NEA during the years of 1916 and 1917 reveal a renewed appreciation of Froebel's principles of self-activity and the child's spontaneous play as a role in development of the individual:

> With such sentiment in regard to the value of play abroad in our land today, we have little conception of what it meant to the educational world when Froebel, less than a hundred years ago, annoust [sic] a new system of education based upon or utilizing the play activities of children, and therewith declared his belief in the educational value of play...Froebel tells us that play is the self-active representation of the inner and that the child who plays thoroly [sic], with self-active determination until physical fatigue forbids, will surely be a determined man (Baker, 1917, p. 423).

From Empty Vessel to Integrated Person

In 1923, criticism of behaviorism appeared:

> I cannot see how behavior can be viewed merely from the standpoint of reaction to environment. Surely a far greater force is continually in evidence in animal and human behavior and this is not dependent upon environment. The big driving force is much deeper and of far greater significance.
>
> The most important motive for behavior is not an instinct. It is a force inherent within all living matter in existence (Podstata, 1923, p. 708).

The inner life of the child was to be liberated in this view so as to allow the child to reach his/her potential:

> From the psychological viewpoint the child is a live-wire. His own little subconscious is a generating station. Like the Faradic current, every make and break of contact with life serves to increase his potentiality. The child who is lacking in out-going impulse, the so-called "good child" who gives us no trouble in discipline, is really an insulated, shut-in personality who can make no growth until the current is re-established. The parent and teacher should welcome every spark of out-going impulse, and be to it a conducting medium so that the child may come into his fullest measure of power.
>
> There is something else we need to recognize as educators and members of the social group, and that is that the child is already a "going concern" when he comes to us. We are not compelled to furnish him with a single human faculty. Curiosity, initiative, pugnacity, sense of justice, loyalty, love of self, love of life, love of power, all are innate, inherent, and fully activated by what the child is within himself... the child [must] be allowed full facility for expression and a free run for

> all his faculties. Discipline must never take on the slightest suggestion of repression but must serve as ample means for safe direction of energy (Jackson, 1923, p. 713).

The kindergarten child was an integrated person and the work of the kindergartner was to:

> work in a scientific way to develop children with strong, vigorous bodies and to help them to appreciate good health and to establish good health habits. She is also working earnestly to develop in her children sound mental and emotional stability. In the free and happy atmosphere of the modern kindergarten the teacher yearns to know the real child and so can help him to overcome faulty emotions. In order that her children may grow in personality and usefulness she gives them much opportunity to think for themselves, to find problems, to make and carry out plans, to compare their work fairly with that of others and to improve upon it (Adler, 1923, p. 717).

As a person, the child was conceived of as having needs that must be met:

> We are concerned with the fact that the child has needs as a perceiving, doing, thinking individual, and that his reactions from this angle cannot be satisfactorily considered in isolation, but must be studied in conjunction with the previously found physical needs. Moreover, he is already feeling and expressing his reactions to that which is beautiful whenever environmental conditions are favorable. Another important group of needs and closely allied to those just enumerated - grows out of the fact that

> he must be thought of as a member of a social group. And the climax of this living tale is the total personality of the child which is largely the outcome of the accumulated successes, compromises, or failures of society in meeting these closely interrelated needs. It is the obligation of educators of young children to raise society's recent standards of achievement in meeting the physical, mental, social, and creative needs of early childhood (Christiansen, 1927, p. 462).

The purpose of education was to "make those growths which will contribute most in developing them [the children] into rich, balanced, well-rounded personalities capable of living worthily, cooperatively, productively, creatively, and happily in the society of which they will be a part" (Smith, 1935, p. 385).

> By 1936, Reginald Bell, Associate Professor at Stanford University, declared: If there is one thing that is being established beyond theperadventure of a doubt by recent psychological study, it is that the child develops as a total organismic entity. No description of growth that is confined to physical terms can be adequate to our purpose. No description that is confined to mental-intellectual aspects of development can be very helpful. No delineation of the child's status purely in terms of his emotional stability or instability can do him justice. No description that regards primarily his social development - the ability which he attains to deal with face to face contacts with individuals or groups -can be regarded as adequate description. Rather, all of these must be included and the interrelationships of one to the others must be seen and appreciated. Each conditions the other, so that a pattern of behavior

> which truly describes the child is dictated by physical aspects of his growth playing upon social aspects of development, reflecting in turn upon his emotional status, and all in turn upon his mental development (1936, p. 269).

"The child at school is not just an individual child but a personality tied by heartstrings of pains and pleasures, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows. It is his emotional life that is most significant" (Myers, 1937, p. 311).

Waves and Streams Revisited

The Child Study Movement as a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

As John Dewey remarked in 1897, the Child Study Movement was "a factor to be reckoned with", and while the movement elevated the status of the child it also reduced the child to an object and subject for experimentation. John Sommerville (1982) wrote: "Then along came science, like a wolf in some tale, bringing a new view of man and of the child. This picture was not as flattering; it found little to say of man's spiritual qualities, emphasizing his animal characteristics instead" (p. 209).

The scientific study of children continues today. The field of early childhood education has grown tremendously since 1890, and along with the expansion of programs for young children has come increased research in the field (Spodek, 1993).

The contemporary philosopher, Gareth Matthews (1994), writing about the models of childhood and theories of development described the advantages and disadvantages of studying children:

> Theories of cognitive and moral development often encourage us to distance ourselves from children - both from the children around us and from our own childhood selves. Such distancing

> sometimes produces a new respect for children...Yet such distancing can also encourage condescension (p. 66).

From the philosopher's lens, children are fellow occupants on the earth and should be respected as such:

> Children are not only objects of study, they are also, with us, members of what Kant called "the kingdom of ends." It is all right to be curious about them, and we should certainly feel responsibility for their education and welfare; but above all, we owe them respect. And here is precisely where our theoretical models fo understanding them may dehumanize them and encourage inappropriately condescending attitudes toward them (Matthews, 1994, p. 27).

From the Religious Spiritual Child to the Self-Expressive Creative Child

An interesting trend was noted within the papers presented at the Kindergarten Department meetings of the NEA during the period from 1890 to 1940. The "whole" child was re-defined and the angelic theory gave way to a new theory of childhood in which the child was a seen as a total organism with needs and desires. Rather than spiritual qualities, the child possessed creative desires.

Conclusion

Varying images of the child are present within the contents of the proceedings of the Kindergarten Department of the NEA from 1890-1940. Although it is possible to trace global trends in the changing concept of the child, it is also very clear that different and sometimes contradictory views were held by individuals simultaneously. As Polakow (1993) has remarked:

> Childhood, however, is not and never has been a timeless develop-

> mental essence that stands above history and class and culture and religion; rather it is a social product, rooted in diverse ways of seeing self, family, motherhood and fatherhood, and one's place in the social order (p. 8).

Perhaps as Helvetius, the French philosopher, believed: "Man is a model exposed to the view of different artists; every one surveys it from some point of view, no one from every point" (cited in Cleverley & Phillips, 1986, p. 146).

Inhabitants as we are in a highly technological scientific age, we may do well to listen to the words of the philosopher:

> The models of development that theories of childhood offer to stimulate our research and challenge our attempts at understanding children may may have many useful functions. But we must guard against letting those models caricature our children and limit the possibilities we are willing to recognize in our dealings with them as fellow human beings (Matthews, 1994, p. 29).

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